

## "My Best Books of the Year"

(Continued from Preceding Page.)

appreciate the keen zest of the collector and the boundless satisfaction to be found in securing rare specimens.

The book of the year which I have read with deepest interest and appreciation is Forel's *Ants and Other Insects*. It would have been utterly impossible for me to varnish eyes, cut off mandibles and clip antennae and wings as did this investigator and his fellow scientists, but I was intensely pleased when this eminent gentleman announced that he had discovered the following traits of character in ants: "choler, fear, jealousy, love, hate, anger and greed."

My satisfaction lay in the fact that if these traits have been definitely discovered in such a low form of evolution as insects then the time certainly has arrived when I may begin to tell without fear of question the things which a lifetime of closest personal intimacy has taught me concerning my birds—a very much higher form of evolution, having nice spines topped by neat little skulls containing wonderful brain convolutions and equipped with ears and almost miraculous eyes.

Among the novels of the year far and away the best I have read from any and every standpoint by which I judge a book of fiction stands Johan Bojer's *The Great Hunger*. I envy the author of this book with bitterest envy because he has the power relentlessly to hew to the line he lays down for himself. I have planned half a dozen books as great as his and in executing them ruined them by romancing, sentimentalizing and prettifying. I could not have killed the fair young girl. I could not have lost the father-in-law's fortune. I could not have let the dog rend the little

child; but I could have gone in the night and planted the rye.

Because I know in my soul I could not have done these things I so thoroughly appreciate the strength of the writer who could.

By Edgar Lee Masters.

THE books that have interested me most during the last twelve months are Theodore Dreiser's *Twelve Men* and the poems of Adelaide Crapsey.

Theodore Dreiser's book is very significant and is a valuable contribution to American literature in view of its wealth of material and its faithful portrayal of American life under metropolitan and rural environment.

Adelaide Crapsey's poems are the crystal core of poetic mineral and more nearly approach the intensity of Emily Dickinson than anything that has been produced.

[Ed. Note: Verse, by Adelaide Crapsey (1878-1914) was published in 1915 by the Manas Press. \$1.]

By Cass Gilbert.

REPLYING to your inquiry, the two books which I have read in the last twelve months which have interested me most are *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* by Ibañez and *The Rough Road* by Locke, particularly the former.

By Mary Johnston.

AMONG the books that in the past year have given me most pleasure I would put:

Of new books, Lafcadio Hearn's *Interpretations of Literature*, Algonon Blackwood's *The Promise of Air*, and *The Candle of Vision*, by "A. E."

Of old, reread books, *Faust* and Walt Whitman.

### Knocking Romance Out of History

ONE of the minor curses of Germanic scholarship is the fashion her pundits set up of taking the romance out of history. Lacking in originality, German writers took to absorbing what others had written and, becoming so many Mr. Gradgrinds, merely assembled facts in their books, leaving all the graces of the romantic aspect of history to "unscientific" writers.

In the adulation of German methods of scholarship that swept over this country, particularly in our universities and colleges for two decades before the outbreak of the war, this new manner of writing history became fairly deep seated, and most doctoral theses written within that period show the taint.

A case in point is Gordon Charles Davidson's *The North West Company*, in which the author has written a history of the second most famous fur company of North America from which all the romance has been carefully extracted. The result is a dull record of the commercial career of the company, with some slight attention paid to its political side.

Everybody who has read ever so little of the doings of this famous fur trading company in Canada and our own North-

west knows full well that its factors were not angels, and violated many of the laws of God and man. They lived hard, were probably very dirty and set a bad example for the Indians to follow. But there dwelt in the souls of most of them the spirit of adventure, and in the souls of some of them the desire to acquire knowledge of remote lands and to take possession of those lands for the honor and glory of their country.

This aspect of the men of the North West Company and their great rival the X. Y. Company is no concern of Mr. Davidson's. What he set out to do was to assemble all the known facts about the North West Company, and he barely suggests the other aspect of its work in footnotes. In fact, he states in the preface, "a complete history of the North West Company is lacking. . . . The final word will not be said until the business papers of the company come to light, providing they are still in existence."

According to the German model Mr. Davidson has done a thoroughly efficient piece of work here; but we sincerely hope that this model will cease to hypnotize our writers of history and that in the future they will return to the school that could clothe the skeleton with the attractive and essential flesh and sinew of true romance.

THE NORTH WEST COMPANY. By Gordon Charles Davidson. University of California Press.



SARAH COMSTOCK, AUTHOR OF "The VALLEY OF VISION"

## Protective League History

IN *The Web* Emerson Hough tells the story of the work of the American Protective League, that organization of 250,000 American business men who during the war aided the Department of Justice by acting as detectives and investigators of cases involving sedition and many other forms of obstruction to the winning of the war.

Mr. Hough begins his narrative by picturing the easygoing, unsuspicious attitude of Americans toward foreigners before the war, and showing how, early in 1917, a little group of men in Chicago came to the aid of the Department of Justice agent by lending that official their motor cars with drivers to help him speed up his investigations of neutrality cases. A. M. Briggs of Chicago is credited with the origin of the scheme that eventually grew into the American Protective League, with headquarters in Washington and branches in every State in the Union.

In the chapter entitled "The Web" are described the multifarious activities of these anonymous workers in the cause of patriotism, and "The League in Washington" gives details of the very large number of cases handled by the league for the Military Intelligence Division of the War Department. These cases grew in number from 819 in May, 1918, to 6,604 in October of the same year, the investigation including applicants for overseas service in the various accredited welfare organizations; applicants for commissions and employment in various branches of the army, ranging from the Quartermaster Corps to the Air Service and chaplains; counter espionage matters, German propaganda, deserters, slackers and various miscellaneous cases, all done at the direct request of the Military Intelligence Division.

The number of investigations for character ran up to 25,515 for the entire country. Miscellaneous investigations alone totalled 136,892 for the country at large. In connection with the operation of the selective service law they totalled 323,349. And 8,000 members of the league assisted at the first registration under this law. The league collected a large number of photographs, drawings and descriptions of bridges, buildings and towns occupied by the German forces in France, Belgium and Luxemburg that were of great value to the Intelligence Division of the United

States Army in preparing for the advance against the German Army. The grand total of cases investigated by the league was 488,950.

There are successive chapters on the new espionage law and how the work of the league was conducted under it; on German propaganda and how it was fought; on German spy cases; on the "slacker raids"; and some tales of how the operatives worked. The second part of the book takes up in turn *The Tales of the Cities*, there being fourteen chapters under this head with a final one devoted to the work in California as a whole.

The third part of the text is a general summary of the work in the four geographical divisions of the country, the text ending with a summary called *The Reckoning* and a discussion of our place at *The Peace Table*. Some of Mr. Hough's text is a familiar tale, owing to the criminal prosecutions of German agents in this country. But for the most part it is a striking revelation of America's homogeneity when called upon to sacrifice time, money and personal effort. This is a story that the men who made it possible may well be proud of.

THE WEB. By Emerson Hough. Reilly & Lee Company. \$2.

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